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ABSTRACT

The research described in this paper was designed to assess how evaluative data were used in instructional decision making in the Portland (Oregon) Public Schools. Using the Level of Use of an Innovation (LoU) interview, a component of the Concerns-Based Adoption Model (CBAM), along with data from the Portland Achievement Levels Test (PALT), the study assessed the relationship between evaluation use and student achievement, the correlation between high-achieving schools and the frequency and effectiveness of evaluations, and the factors of evaluation that link it with improved school achievement. Thirty-six principals and 82 teachers in grades 3-8 were randomly selected for interview by 9 certified LoU interviewers. The interviews focused on four key components of the use of PALT evaluative data: (1) the use of student achievement reports; (2) the use of school administrative reports; (3) the role of evaluation reports in decision making; and (4) the decision situations where evaluation reports are used. Results are reported and tabulated for each of the four research questions. The use of evaluation was found to have a significant effect on 93 percent of the 126 teachers and administrators interviewed; these findings suggest that inservice support is needed to develop knowledge and skills in evaluation use, that personality traits may be a factor in movement of individuals to higher levels of use, and that the Level of Use interview technique produces rich descriptive information on how individuals use evaluative data in instructional planning and decision making. A bibliography is included and instrumentation is appended. (TE)

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IMPROVING INSTRUCTIONAL DECISION MAKING:

The Relationship between Level of Use of Evaluation and Student Achievement

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Paper Presented at the Annual Meeting of the
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IMPROVING INSTRUCTIONAL DECISION MAKING: The Relationship between Level of Use of Evaluation and Student Achievement

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Among techniques designed to improve education, there has been a recent surge of interest in encouraging the use of evaluative data in instructional planning and decision making. The basic assumption underlying these efforts is that the use of evaluative data will enable teachers and administrators to become better decision makers about delivering instruction. This should result in improved student achievement.

The research effort described in this paper was designed to help teachers make better use of evaluation information. This paper assesses how evaluative data were used in instructional decision making. It investigates the level of use of evaluation and the relationship to student achievement. Lessons learned in this research are discussed in an effort to provide guidance to other researchers interested in evaluation use and its impact on student achievement.

Background and Assumptions

By way of background, this study of evaluation use in instructional planning and decision making began in 1986 as part of the Evaluation Department's commitment to the improvement of

the Portland Achievement Levels Test (PALT). The PALT program was originally developed in 1977 to measure student achievement on the District curriculum. All students in grades three through eight are tested each fall and spring. The program currently disseminates 13 student achievement or administrative evaluation reports to the schools twice a year after testing.

The Evaluation Department produces evaluation reports to meet general district, as well as school, needs for evaluative data. Teachers and principals use the evaluative information to target instruction on specific skills, to group students, to plan large and small group instruction, and to communicate with parents and other school professionals. The researchers emphasize that the PALT is used in instructional decision making, not as the sole authority on student achievement, but in conjunction with other types of classroom assessment data available to Portland's educators.

Understanding how educators use evaluative data is the research focus of the Portland Public Schools' instructional decision making study. The study asks the following questions:

1. What is the relationship between evaluation use and student achievement?

2. Do high achieving schools use evaluative data more effectively or more frequently than lower achieving schools, when other important variables are held constant?

3. If evaluation use makes a difference, what factors link it with improved school achievement?

The primary research tool used in seeking answers to the study questions was the Level of Use of an Innovation (LoU) interview, a component of the Concerns-Based Adoption Model (Hall, Wallace, and Dossett, 1973).

The Concerns-Based Adoption Model (CBAM) is a conceptual framework for understanding the process of implementing change in schools. Research suggests that as individuals are introduced to change, they pass through predictable phases in their behavior or use of an innovation from nonuse, through mechanical use, to renewal. While not strictly an ordinal scale, the Levels of Use scale usually finds individuals progressing from lower to higher levels, although they may move up or down the levels as their use of the innovation changes.

Though the Concerns-Based Adoption Model is well accepted in change process literature, its use has been limited in research on evaluation use. The LoU technique has been used successfully to study evaluation use in other school districts (Pechman and King, 1986). These researchers used the Levels of Use framework to define their Structure of School Evaluation Use (SSEU). Hall (1982) proposed a configuration of key components for evaluation use as an innovation.

The research on student achievement obtained by teachers at different Levels of Use is also limited. Loucks (1975) found a

curvilinear relationship with higher student achievement in reading correlated with higher use of individualized reading by teachers. A different curvilinear relationship was observed in math with the same teachers. Reidy and Hord (1979) found that with an achievement monitoring math program the more extensively teachers used the program, the more the students achieved. The current study applied the LoU method, specifically Levels of Use of evaluation, to explore its impact on student achievement.

Levels of Use of Evaluation

Measure - In order to determine a baseline measure of evaluation use, the researchers used a focused Levels of Use interview technique. The Levels of Use (LoU) model was developed by Gene Hall and Susan Loucks at the Research and Development Center for Teacher Education, University of Texas-Austin.

The LoU interview is a diagnostic protocol useful in describing the implementation of an innovation. The protocol is generic; it can describe different innovations by changing the point of reference. For our purpose, the innovation was defined as use of the Portland Achievement Levels Test (PALT) evaluation reports. While this is a complex innovation, the reports have been used by district staff for ten years. The model identifies eight levels of use of the innovation: nonuse, orientation, preparation, mechanical use, routine, refinement, integration, and renewal.

Figure 1 presents the developmental Levels of Use for the innovation of evaluation report use and the behavioral indicators as defined in the study.

Figure 1
Levels of Use and Behavioral Definitions

Level of Use	Behavioral Definition of Evaluation Use
0 NONUSE	User has little or no knowledge of evaluation reports and no involvement with reports.
I ORIENTATION	User has recently acquired information about evaluation reports or is exploring the value and demands of evaluation on the user system.
II PREPARATION	User prepares for first use of evaluation reports.
III MECHANICAL USE	User focuses on short term use of evaluation reports with little reflection. Changes in use are made to meet user needs. User is engaged in a step-by-step attempt to master the task of using evaluation reports, often resulting in disjointed and superficial use.
IVA ROUTINE	Stable use of evaluation reports. Few changes are made in use. Little thought is given to improving evaluation use or its consequences.
IVB REFINEMENT	User varies the use of evaluation reports to increase impact on students. Variations are based on knowledge of both short and long-term consequences for students.
V INTEGRATION	User combines own efforts to use evaluation reports with activities of colleagues to achieve a collective impact on students.
VI RENEWAL	User reevaluates the quality of evaluation reports, seeks major modifications or alternatives to current reports to increase student impact, examines new developments in the field, and goal for self or the system.

The dependent variable, student achievement, was measured by the growth exhibited in reading, math, and language usage PALT scores achieved by students of the interviewed teachers between the fall 1986 and spring 1987 testings.

Sample - Levels of Use interviews were conducted with 126 teachers and administrators by nine certified LoU interviewers. Participants included 8 Directors of Instruction, 36 principals, and 82 teachers in grades 3-8. Subjects were randomly selected from 40 or half of the elementary schools in the district. The experience of subjects in their role ranged from 1-25 years and their knowledge of evaluation varied from nonuser to specialist.

Experience shows that asking more removed sources, such as superintendents or area administrators, about the evaluation use by their staff is questionable. The only way to know if, and how, the innovation is being used is to directly assess individual use. The Levels of Use method let us focus on how individuals were currently using evaluation reports.

Procedure - Before conducting the LoU interviews, the researchers identified key elements of the innovation, use of PALT evaluative data. After reviewing preliminary interviews with principals and test coordinators and discussing the use of PALT reports with the Evaluation Department's management team, four key components of the use of PALT evaluative data were identified: 1) the use of

student achievement reports, 2) the use of school administrative reports, 3) the role of evaluation reports in decision making, and 4) the decision situations where evaluation reports are used. An innovation configuration checklist was developed to array the various patterns of evaluation report use from ideal use to nonuse (see appendix).

To measure Levels of Use, interviewees were asked a series of branching interview questions and follow-up probes. Interviews averaged 20 minutes and appeared to the interviewees to be casual conversations about how the individual was using PALT reports.

The Level of Use interviews were conducted by trained LoU interviewers and raters. Interviews were tape recorded and the resultant tapes were rated by the interviewer. In order to maintain reliability, a second rater listened to each tape and independently evaluated the interviewee's level of use of evaluation reports. If the two raters did not agree on the LoU, a third rater listened to the tape. Overall LoU was determined when two raters agreed on the rating.

Of the total 126 LoU tapes, 106 or 84% were agreed on by the first two raters. Of the remaining 20 tapes, 16 or 13% were classified by the third rater. Only 4 or 3% required a fourth rater for a final rating. Overall inter-rater reliability was .82 on the Level of Use of evaluation reports.

Results

At the request of the Levels of Use interviewer cadre, the researchers defined the users and use of evaluation reports as:

> Use of evaluation reports = Teachers, principals, or Directors of Instruction who make any use of the Portland Achievement Levels Test reports to guide decision making in planning or instruction for students, teachers, or parents.

Table 1 presents the distribution of the sample by Level of Use of PALT evaluation reports. Ninety-three percent of those interviewed were identified as users of evaluation reports; seven percent of the district sample were nonusers of evaluation data.

Table 1

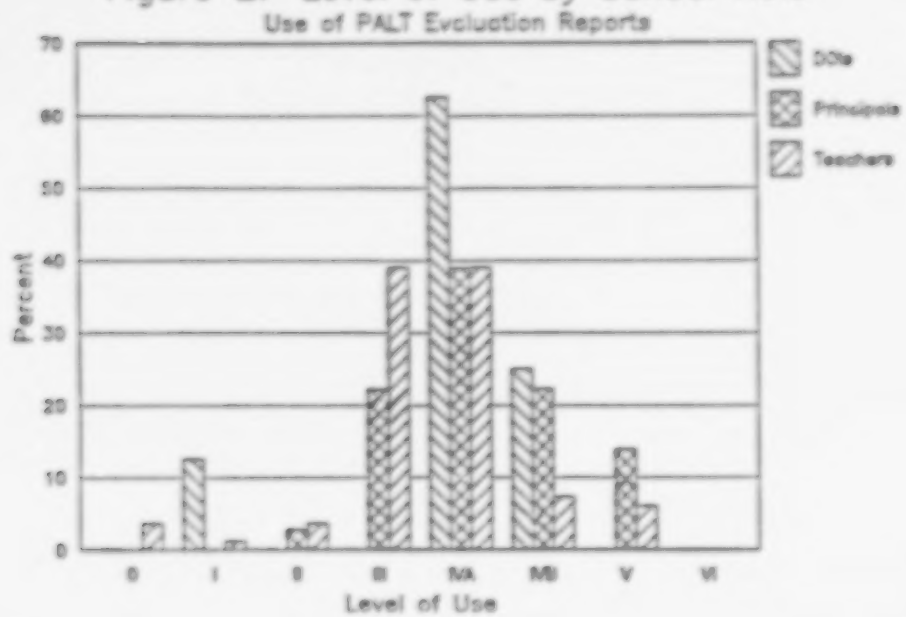
Distribution of the Sample by Level of Use

(N=126)

LoU	0	I	II	III	IVA	IVB	V	VI
N	3	2	4	40	51	16	10	0
%	2%	2%	3%	32%	40%	13%	8%	0%

Figure 2 presents the Levels of Use of evaluative reports by school role. The LoU interviews found that overall more principals (97%) than teachers (85%) reported using evaluation data in instructional planning and decision making.

Figure 2. Level of Use by School Role



Among users of evaluation reports, 32% are Mechanical Users (LoU III). This group needs training and support in the use and interpretation of evaluative data. The largest group, 40% of the sample, were identified as Routine users (LoU IVA). These individuals are stable, comfortable users of PALT evaluative data. Knowledgeable Routine use is the goal we want people to achieve. Interviews also identified a group of "enhanced users," i.e., individuals at the higher Levels of Use of Refinement (LoU IVB), Integration (LoU V), or Renewal (LoU VI). These "enhanced users," 21% of the sample, are comfortable with using PALT reports and often make refinements to increase student impact. Principals are more likely to be higher level users of evaluation than teachers; while 36% of the principals are "enhanced users" of the reports, only 13% of teachers are among this group.

Student Achievement

The paragraphs below respond directly to the research questions addressing the relationship between levels of use of evaluation reports and student achievement.

Question 1. What is the relationship between evaluation use and student achievement?

Table 2 presents the means and standard deviations for reading growth scores of students by teacher Level of Use. Results of a test of significance among the means in reading growth are presented in Table 3. The results of the analysis of variance indicated no significant differences among the means in growth in reading achievement.

Table 2

Means and Standard Deviations of Student Reading Growth by Teacher Level of Use

Grades 3-8

LoU Groups	N	Mean Growth	Standard Deviation
III	13	-.4448	1.4055
IV-A	18	.7670	2.6579
IV-B	1	-.5776	0.0
V	0		

Table 3

Analysis of Variance of Reading Growth

by Teacher Level of Use

Sources	SS	df	MS	F
LoU	11.081	1	11.081	2.233*
Error	143.925	29	4.963	
Total	155.006	30	5.167	

* $p > .05$

Table 4 presents the means and standard deviations for math growth scores of students by teacher LoU. Results of a test of significance among the means in math are displayed in Table 5. The results of the analysis of variance indicated no significant differences among the means in mathematics achievement.

Table 4

Means and Standard Deviations of Student Math Growth

by Teacher Level of Use

Grades 3-8

LoU Groups	N	Mean Growth	Standard Deviation
III	12	-.2056	1.1572
IV-A	18	-.3080	1.9980
IV-B	1	1.5553	0.0
V	1	-.8348	0.0

Table 5

Analysis of Variance of Math Growth

by Teacher Level of Use

Sources	SS	df	MS	F
LoU	.824	2	.412	.140*
Error	85.465	29	2.947	
Total	86.289	31	2.784	

* p > .05

Table 6 displays the means and standard deviations for language growth scores by teacher Level of Use. Analysis of variance results among the means in language are presented in Table 7. The results of the analysis of variance indicated no significant differences among the means in language achievement.

Table 6

Means and Standard Deviations of Student Language Growth

by Teacher Level of Use

Grades 3-8

LoU Groups	N	Mean Growth	Standard Deviation
III	11	-.6058	1.9197
IV-A	22	-.3243	1.8092
IV-B	1	-.1048	0.0
V	3	.8972	1.2190

Table 7

Analysis of Variance of Language Growth

by Teacher Level of Use

Sources	SS	df	MS	F
LoU	4.637	2	2.318	.722*
Error	109.220	34	3.212	
Total	113.857	36	3.163	

* p > .05

Question 2. Do high achieving schools use evaluative data more effectively or more frequently than lower achieving schools, when other important variables are held constant?

Analysis of LoU in 34 schools which had at least three teacher or principal LoU ratings indicated that 10 schools or 29% were using evaluation reports at a Mechanical Use level. Eleven schools or 32% were using evaluative reports at a Routine level and 2 schools or 6% were "enhanced users" of evaluation reports.

When schools were grouped by achievement growth, analysis found individuals at higher achieving schools more frequent users of evaluative data. Yet, the analysis of teacher use of reports found no differences between low and high achieving schools.

Question 3. If evaluation use makes a difference, what factors link it with improved school achievement?

The researchers hypothesized a positive relationship between level of use of evaluation reports and increased student achievement. We expected to see different student outcomes at different levels of use. For example, LoU III Mechanical Users of evaluation reports are struggling with logistics and management problems associated with new use of evaluation reports. Mechanical users should have less effect on student achievement than Routine users. Higher level users, those at LoU IV-B Refinement, are adapting their use of evaluation reports to increase student impact. Thus, Refinement users should have more positive results than either Mechanical or Routine users. If this hypothesis held, there would be an increasing relationship between level of evaluation use and student achievement.

A variety of statistical procedures was used to explore the relationship between level of use of evaluative data and student achievement. Although some relationships were observable within schools and grade groups, no significant correlations were obtained. The exploratory analysis of student achievement suggests that the relationship is not based on the defined level of use, but may lie more directly in how the evaluative data are actually used in decision making.

Limitations

Several lessons in serendipity were learned during the exploration of the relationship of level of evaluation use to student achievement. While the findings did not support the hypothesis, the researchers did discover other valuable results.

First, the anonymity promised to the LoU interviewees proved to be a major limitation in the analysis of student achievement data. The analysis was also limited by the unavailability of student achievement data for approximately half of the teachers. We could have screened the teacher sample to ensure the availablity of student outcome data. But certainly the small sample sizes limited our ability to discern postive relationships between level of evaluation use and student achievement.

Second, the innovation of evaluation use might have been more explicitly defined before beginning the interviews. While the interview cadre did uniformly define the use of PALT evaluation reports and the interrater reliability was good, a more exhaustive list of the possible patterns of use would have helped the early ratings of Level of Use by the interviewers and raters. Nevertheless, the LoU interviews did produce an explicit list of variations of evaluation use by the end of the study.

Finally, further research is needed on the scalar properties of the Levels of Use. Some researchers describe it as a nominal scale; others view it as an ordinal scale. While it seems evident from the definitions of the LoU scale that there are some ordinal characteristics, further proof of these characteristics would strengthen future research.

Summary

The use of evaluation had a large impact on 93% of the 126 teachers and administrators interviewed during 1986-87. A majority of the sample were supporters of PALT evaluation reports for use in instructional planning and decision making.

Research on Levels of Use indicates that it often takes a minimum of a year for users of an innovation to move beyond Mechanical Use (LoU III). While PALT reports have been in use in Portland for almost ten years, the study found 32% of the participants were still at the Mechanical Use level. This suggests that with an innovation as complex as evaluation use, it can take substantially longer for users to become comfortable, stable Routine users. It is unlikely to occur without inservice support to develop knowledge and skills in evaluation use.

Individuals at the Routine level of evaluation use may or may not move to the Refinement level. If they encounter further

change or frustration, they may drop back to Mechanical Use; if they receive support and are positively predisposed towards evaluation, they may move on to Refinement or Integration. The researchers believe that there are personality traits which may be a factor in the movement of individuals to higher levels. Further evidence for this will be sought in the case studies of school evaluation use during 1987-88.

The link between evaluation use and effective educational practice has been well established (Griswold, Cotton, & Hansen, 1985; Pratt, Winters, & George, 1980; Williams & Bank, 1981). It is our belief is that if evaluative data are used routinely, appropriately, and effectively for instructional decision making, there ought to be observable results in improved student performance. The results of this study, while not validating the hypothesis, do indicate positive trends in the relationship between teacher level of use and student achievement.

The Level of Use interview technique produces rich descriptive information on how individuals use evaluative data in instructional planning and decision making. Utilizing this theory-based model can guide researchers and practitioners in the use of appropriate, timely, and quality evaluation information in instructional decision making.

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APPENDIX

- Innovation Configuration Checklist
- Levels of Evaluation Use Interview Protocol
- Levels of Use Rating Sheet
- Guide to Level of Evaluation Use

INNOVATION CONFIGURATION CHECKLIST

USE OF PALT EVALUATION REPORTS

IDEAL USE	ACCEPTABLE USE		UNACCEPTABLE USE
1. Use of PALT Achievement Reports			
Reports are reviewed and used extensively for instructional planning and decision making.	Some reports are emphasized; findings used periodically.	Reports are skimmed over; used infrequently.	Knows nothing about PALT achievement reports or use.
2. Use of PALT Administrative Reports			
Reports are reviewed and used extensively for instructional planning and decision making.	Some reports are emphasized; findings used periodically to verify decision.	Reports are skimmed over; used infrequently.	Knows nothing of administrative reports or their use.
3. Role of Evaluation Reports in Decision Making			
One of multiple influences.	One of multiple influences.	Not considered.	Not considered.
4. Decision Situations Where Evaluation is Used			
Instructional planning forecasting, goal setting, staff development, and instructional decisions.	Student placement, course scheduling, monitoring, verifying. decisions or actions.	No clear pattern of use.	Does not use evaluation data in instructional decision making.

LoU Interview

0-II/III-VI	Are you currently using evaluation reports, specifically PALT student achievement or administrative reports?

If yes, turn page. If no, continue.

NO

Have you ever used them in the past? If so, when? Why did you stop?

If yes, go to PAST USERS (Below)

If no, continue.

0/I-II	Have you made a decision to use evaluation reports in the future?
I/II	If so, when will you begin use?
Knowledge	Can you describe your use of evaluation reports for me?
Acquiring Information	Are you currently looking for any information about achievement or administrative reports? What kinds? For what purposes?
Knowledge	What do you see as the strengths and weaknesses of PALT evaluation reports in your situation?
Assessing	At this point in time, what kinds of questions are you asking about using student achievement reports or administrative reports? Give examples if necessary.
Sharing	Do you ever talk with others and share information about PALT evaluation reports? What do you share?
Planning	What are you planning with respect to using evaluation reports? Can you tell me about any preparation or plans you have been making for the use of PALT student achievement or administrative reports?
Final Question (Optional)	Can you summarize for me where you see yourself right now in relation to the use of evaluation reports?

PAST USERS

Can you describe for me how you organized your use of evaluation reports, what problems you found, what the effects appeared to be on students?

When you assess PALT student achievement and administrative reports at this point in time, what do you see as the strengths and weaknesses?

NOW, GO TO ABOVE SECTION, STARTING WITH QUESTION MARKED 0/I-II.

LEVEL OF USE RATING SHEET

Tape #: Site: Interviewer:
Date: / / I.D. #: Rater:

Level	Knowledge	Acquiring Information	Sharing	Assessing	Planning	Status Reporting	Performing	Overall LoU
Non-Use D.P. A	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Orientation D.P. B	I	I	I	I	I	I	I	I
Preparation D.P. C	II	II	II	II	II	II	II	II
Mechanical Use D.P. D-1	III	III	III	III	III	III	III	III
Routine D.P. D-2	IVA	IVA	IVA	IVA	IVA	IVA	IVA	IVA
Refinement D.P. E	IVB	IVB	IVB	IVB	IVB	IVB	IVB	IVB
Integration D.P. F	V	V	V	V	V	V	V	V
Renewal	VI	VI	VI	VI	VI	VI	VI	VI
User is not doing:	ND	ND	ND	ND	ND	ND	ND	
No information in interview:	NI	NI	NI	NI	NI	NI	NI	

Past User _____ Estimated past LoU _____

The amount of information in the interview was:	insufficient for rating	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	very adequate for rating
The interviewee:	does not fit on the chart	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	fits well on the chart
The interviewee:	was very difficult to interview	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	was no problem to interview

A GUIDE TO LEVELS OF EVALUATION USE

Innovation: Use of Evaluative Data

(Adapted from Fechman & King, 1986, Hall, 1982 and Hall & Loucks, 1975)

LoU 0 - NONUSE
A preliminary stage in which the user is unaware of the potential usefulness of evaluative data and its applicability to instructional planning. The nonuser does not look for information to support evaluation use. This level is uncommon because educators have become more sensitive to the expectation that schools should be involved in a continuous evaluation process.

Decision Point I	*When potential users take action to learn more about evaluative data or procedures for using evaluation information, they have moved to Level I, Orientation.*

LoU I - ORIENTATION
These users are exploring the idea of using FALT reports and are considering how the reports might fit their own needs for evaluation data.

Decision Point II	*When the potential user makes a decision to begin using evaluative data or reports by a specific time or action, such as asking for a consultation with an evaluator to begin using the Student Goal Report, they have moved to Level II, Preparation.*

LoU II - PREPARATION
This is a pre-use level; the person has made the decision to begin using evaluation and is preparing for first use. These individuals may recognize the need to review evaluation data, but not knowing quite how to do it, they assign the task to a staff person. They are not quite certain what to expect, but vaguely expect feedback from the designated person or evaluator.

Decision Point III	*As users begins first use of evaluation reports by reviewing the data and making a serious effort to use data in student placement, planning or individualizing instruction, informally or simply, they have moved to Level III, Mechanical Use.*

LoU III - MECHANICAL USE
At this stage, early users may request assistance in understanding and interpreting evaluative data and reports. They may discuss school or classroom evaluation information in staff/team meetings or in instructional planning. The mechanical user employs evaluation in obligatory ways, e.g., reviewing reports in meetings or distributing summaries of key data to staff. The user does not consider the quality of the evaluation process and pays little attention to the role of evaluation and its use in program implementation, planning, or change.

Decision Point IVa	*When the user has established a comfortable use of evaluative data within their situation, they have moved to Level IV:A, Routine.*

LoU IVa - ROUTINE
At this stage, regular use of evaluation reports as part of the annual cycle of program planning, forecasting, and assessment is in place. The users routinely employs trend data in program planning. A skeleton evaluation process is implemented; routine users do not implement a systematic organizational use of the evaluation reports, but use evaluative data in limited, nondynamic ways.

Decision Point IVb	*At this level, users begin to make small changes in their use of data on the basis of formal or informal evaluation information to improve their use and increase student outcomes.*

LoU IVb - REFINEMENT
The Refinement level marks the beginning of systematic use of evaluative data to make program changes. At this stage, the use of evaluation reports is restricted. There may be attempts to mold report data to provide information needed for specific school or classroom decisions. Users might create special report summaries tailored to meet their needs. Decision makers seek out usable data by modifying the existing reports or providing staff training to assure that the data are systematically generated and dependably reported. The user's commitment to use of evaluation data is put into action; this is the start of turning theory into practice.

Decision Point V	*By initiating changes in the use of evaluative data in coordination with what colleagues are doing, the user reaches Level V, Integration. The decision to take action and make instructional changes is based on informal feedback from the evaluator, formal test data, and evaluation reports.*

LoU V - INTEGRATION
At this level, the user implements higher levels of use by proactively supporting the use of evaluation information both verbally and through managerial actions. The systematic planned use of evaluation is well coordinated. The user carefully determines what types of evaluative data have practical use for different audiences. Test data are routinely disseminated and responded to by staff; colleagues collaborate to assure the report information is interpreted, understood, and disseminated to staff. Instructional changes are monitored and where possible, are based on evaluation report findings.

Decision Point VI	*User begins exploring major modifications or replacement of current evaluation data and reports.*

LoU VI - RENEWAL
This user reevaluates the quality of evaluative data to assure it adequately serve her needs for instructional planning. This review process is continuous and well integrated into the school structure. It is comprehensive and reaches all levels of administration, staff, and parents. Renewal decision makers routinely expect student achievement data, take action to obtain it, analyze its worth and practicality, and use it to make data based instructional decisions.